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# Families and Education

United Nations

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# Families and Education

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The present paper was prepared for the IYF secretariat by John Bennett, who directs the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) project *The Young Child and the Family Environment*.

The views expressed here are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the United Nations Secretariat or UNESCO.

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# I. Families of the world

## Introduction

The General Assembly, in its resolution 44/82, proclaimed 1994 as the International Year of the Family. Three principles were at the heart of the Year:

- The family constitutes the basic unit of society and therefore merits special attention.
- Families assume diverse forms and functions from one country to another and are a reflection of the pluralism that enriches the world community.
- The United Nations promotes the basic human rights of every individual in the family, whatever his or her status, and gives special attention to the rights of women and children.

As the basic unit of society, families provide the affective and material support essential to the development of their members. In times past, and today in most of the world, families were and are the indispensable safety net for dependants, including the elderly, disabled and infirm. Born of social necessity, they have been in all ages dynamic agents of social and economic progress and, at the same time, creators of security and social order. They have offered, in particular, an in-depth and long-term approach to the rearing of children that only very costly programmes are able to replicate. In their diverse forms, they merit the close attention of statutory and non-statutory agencies working in the fields of health, social affairs, education and human resources planning.

Since the nineteenth century at least, the family in its European manifestation has been attacked as a patriarchal and oppressive institution.* Today, it is under criticism from organizations seeking more equality for women in society, often with real justification. Given, however, its social necessity, its permanence in all human groups and the strength of psychological feeling invested in family relations, a common-sense approach would dictate not the eradication of the family but its education, so that it becomes, as viewed by a majority of French adults, "as a central value, allowing scope for personal freedom and fulfilment [1]".

In the great metropolises of the world there are signs of social collapse: neglect and abandonment of children, soaring divorce rates, the phenomenon of street children, youth violence and crime. Large-scale, sector-driven programmes have been applied to delinquent environments but without great success. Renewal of infrastructure, increased policing, vocational retraining of youth, food stamps – all have proven too shallow. Renewed attention needs to be given to families, referred to in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (General Assembly resolution 44/25, annex) as "the fundamental group of society", and to policies which will improve their capacity to care for and educate children. The key intervening variable in preventing delinquency, according to a United Nations report [2] is "the strength of adult-child relationships, most notably family relationships". If supported by education, social networks and intelligent government policies, the capacity of families for long-term commitment to children and to community renewal will re-emerge.

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*See for example, the well-known critique by Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, or the sexual politics theories put forward by Wilhelm Reich in the 1920s.

## A. Modes of family functioning

The table shows at a glance where the majority of the world's children live, their health status, the economic and literacy levels of the adults who care for them, the probable reproductive rates of families in the foreseeable future and the present access of their children to educational opportunity. Clearly, a great imbalance between developed and developing countries emerges from such statistics. The parts of the world with the highest economic and literacy rates have the fewest children under five and the lowest fertility rates; they have also the highest rate of marriage breakdown (not shown in the table). Those regions with the least available funds and lowest educational levels are most likely to have many children under five, high fertility rates and many problems in ensuring the care, protection and education of children.

The division of the world into developing and industrial economies* obviously influences family functioning and the type of education needed. Without being too simplistic,** one can speak of two contrasting modes of family functioning: the survival mode and the industrial mode. The former, by far the more widespread mode, is found in the economies of the developing world, which hold a large and vulnerable portion of the world's families. It is estimated that three out of four of the world's children live in survival conditions. The industrial mode of functioning, communicated worldwide through the media, is associated with the relatively small but extremely influential urbanized middle classes of the Western world. Between these two modes of family functioning are other powerful modes, especially in Asia, which although strongly influenced by tradition, are in the process of shedding survival habits. China, for example, consciously modernized traditional family structures and attitudes during the revolutionary period, giving women a much better status than they had had traditionally. Today, its family model is unique: progressive but deeply influenced by Confucian tradition and now being affected by the rapid industrialization of Chinese society.

### *1. The survival mode of family functioning*

Much of the world's population is still subject to survival modes of production, often reinforced by extreme poverty, disease, war, famine or migration. Thus, the agrarian peoples of the developing countries, living in relative isolation in the countryside or as unwelcome migrants in the great metropolises, toil incessantly to eat and survive. As was the case in much of Europe a century ago, family organization is based on the iron law of necessity. To survive, all members of the family, including the children, must place economic and family interests before their own. Children are reared to be hard-working, obedient and loyal to the family, and from an early age they contribute to the economic survival of the group.

The belief that the child is the property of the parents is common, and the notion of child rights would be felt by many such families as divisive and a potential threat to parental authority. Children are seen as a source of family income, both in their younger years through their work or sale value and in their later years as the carers for the parents in their old age. In extreme patriarchal settings, in which boys are considered to have greater work value, girls are frequently housebound (to enhance their marriage value)

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*This division can be misleading. Human development is a continuum and many families and children in the developing world enjoy a better quality of life than those in disadvantaged sections of Western societies. A problem for the developing world, however, is the relatively small size of their formal economies and the vastness of their poor, marginalized sectors. Yet, even in such sectors, the influence of Western models is gradually bringing about the nuclearization of families and the spread of Western child-rearing models.

**Family typologies are multiple and the evolution of family forms rapid and complex. In anthropological literature, families are classified according to type of marriage, customary residence, authority, descent and inheritance, and kin composition (nuclear, extended, tribal etc.). Cultural analyses concentrate more on family types in the major geographical regions and on the religious influences undergone by the family. Sociologists tend to treat demographic factors, urbanization, changes in marriage and behaviour patterns, scientific progress and other sociocultural influences on family behaviour.

**Comparative statistics on young children, families and education in different regions**

| | *Young child* | | | *Family and community* | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | *Literacy rates, 1995 (%)* | | | | *Education: gross enrolment ratio, 1991 (%)* | |
| *Region* | *Children under five, 1993 (millions)* | *Under five mortality rate, 1993 (deaths per thousand)* | *Malnourished children under five, 1992 (%)* | *Males* | *Females* | *Total fertility rate per woman, 1993* | *GNP per capita, 1992 (US$)* | *Pre-primary* | *Primary* |
| Africa | 100.9 | 163 | 25 | 66 | 46 | 6.1 | 795 | 11 | 79 |
| Arab States | 38.2 | 74 | 16 | 71 | 51 | 5.3 | 4 767 | 19 | 90 |
| Latin America | 51.5 | 45 | 12 | 88 | 85 | 3.5 | 2 048 | 47 | 105 |
| Caribbean | 3.4 | 33 | 11 | 89 | 88 | 2.8 | 3 553 | 37 | 93 |
| Asia | 384.1 | 76 | 33 | 88 | 83 | 3.9 | 4 173 | 33 | 102 |
| North America | 21.6 | 9 | 8 | 99 | 99 | 1.9 | 21 975 | 65 | 105 |
| Europe | 48.0 | 15 | 6 | 98 | 96 | 1.9 | 11 364 | 69 | 100 |

*Source*: UNESCO, Young Child and Family Database, 1995.

and sometimes abandoned, neglected or sold. By Western standards, children of both sexes are often treated harshly, even abusively, by uneducated parents living under duress.

The traditional family has been modified, however, in all parts of the world by numerous modernizing factors. In many instances, it is no longer the dominant unit of economic production and its dependency on intergenerational solidarity, including the need to have large families, is no longer as great as in the past. Yet, subsistence modes of production and the traditions and religious beliefs attached to them have an enormous influence. Even when rural populations have migrated to cities and, in the course of time, participate in modern production modes, urban institutions and the money economy, they may be obliged, for the sake of cohesion and survival, to cling to the family forms and traditions attached to their former way of living. Rejecting the senselessness, marginalization and misery that accompany certain types of industrialization, they return to past beliefs and practices that ensure the cohesion of the family group and a world view that gives purpose to existence.

### *2. The industrial mode of family functioning*

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, on a very small part of the earth's surface, a revolutionary idea took root that a society could do more than survive and, rather than repeat the past cycles of prosperity and misery, could rationally construct a better future [3]. No longer would the struggle for survival dominate people's lives but rather the pursuit of happiness. The will to create a better future for all was sealed by an implicit social contract between government and people. Authority gave way to reliance on knowledge, and the influence of institutions that had given legitimacy to traditional society was progressively replaced: in the home by notions of autonomy and privacy and in the larger society by the rule of law. In the area of family formation, the same movement could be detected. There occurred a move away from institutionalized or arranged marriages towards unions based on free choice and desire. Within these unions, the procreation of children was seen not as a destiny to be accepted but as a freely chosen means of achieving happiness.

Today, this type of society and its model of family happiness are slowly spreading throughout the world. The child or children born from unions of choice are generally treated with much love and consideration. Few obstacles are placed in their way, unless their desires are seen to interfere with their health, schooling or future happiness. Appeals to authority or family honour, not to mention harsh confrontations with superior force, are rarely resorted to and conflict is negotiated, as it is among adults. In short, the child is treated as a subject of desire, with full rights to respect and equal treatment.*

Yet, much socialization takes place outside the home. The ideology of achievement, competition, production and consumption that dominates the industrial world ensures that the perception of the child as a small adult to be trained survives robustly in contemporary society. Children are made to work extraordinarily long hours at school, in directive, authoritarian classrooms, so as to forge them into a disciplined future workforce. They are seen by many policy makers as units of human resources, the future guarantors of pensions, social values, even of nationhood and other ideologies. Despite lip-service to developmentally appropriate practices, schools do not always encourage children to be creative and adaptive, to make choices, to learn sociability and to engage in real problem-solving, all of which are skills that may better serve the societies of the future.

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*This is obviously an idealized picture. Western-style child-rearing has many weaknesses, such as widespread ignorance of child development, emotional neglect and coldness towards children and an emphasis on individualistic values at the expense of cooperative behaviour.

## B. Societies and families in crisis

Since the end of the Second World War, the world has made progress in many fields. There has been enormous growth in wealth and trade, communications, technology, child health, education, democracy and civil liberties. Progress should not blind us, however, to the fact that there are serious global problems that adversely affect the majority of families worldwide and impede them in their task of caring for and educating their children. Some of these problems are described next.

### *1. Uncontrolled population growth, poverty and environmental degradation*

Perhaps the most urgent problem that contemporary societies have to confront is a population increase unmatched by an increase in resources. If population growth continues its present trend, an additional 3 billion people will be living on the planet by the year 2025, with 90 per cent of the increase occurring in the developing world. Serious consequences for the planetary environment can be predicted. More specifically, there will be an increase, taking 1990 as a base, of over 100 million primary school children before the year 2000. Apart from requiring more school buildings, such an increase in the school-going population calls for the training and employment of 4 million extra teachers, a financial investment which many of the least developed countries cannot afford. Without education, particularly for girls, little can be achieved voluntarily for population control.

### *2. Rapid change in family structures*

Common to both the industrial and developing worlds is the phenomenon of rapid social change, which impacts significantly on sexual relationships, family formation and attitudes to rearing children. The transformation of family structures in the North has fuelled real anxiety about the institution of the family. Many, perhaps most, adults in Europe and North America were born into societies where marriage and the nuclear family were basic facts of existence. According to the Bureau of the Census of the United States, births to unwed mothers increased 70 per cent from 1983 to 1993, totalling 27 per cent of all live births in the latter year. The Bureau also recorded in that year that 6.3 million children under 18 years of age were living with an unmarried (generally female) parent, compared to 243,000 children in 1960. Obviously, such figures need to be interpreted with care, but no society can afford to be complacent about paternal abandonment of partner and offspring.

United States figures are repeated in many countries, developed and developing, where out-of-wedlock births are increasing rapidly among the most disadvantaged populations. Unless substantial social and family support is provided, a vicious circle is created for mother and child, leading to poverty and social marginalization. The Census Bureau presents stark evidence of the disadvantage faced by children of single, teenage mothers in comparison to children born of two parents living in stable unions, either marital or consensual. Along with unwanted children and children separated from their parents, the children of single, teenage mothers are high on the list of children considered most at risk [4].*

Indicators of family breakdown are more difficult to obtain for the developing countries, but the crisis is no less real. We know that the proportion of female-headed households is growing owing to migration of husbands, marital dissolution and out-of-wedlock child-bearing, and, as in the North, these changes in

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*Western governments often face severe public criticism when it appears that a disproportionate part of the social security budget is being diverted to single parents. Such criticism can become vociferous if it is established that the single-mother phenomenon is significantly more common in ethnic, migrant or low social class milieux. A common reaction is to attempt to impose family obligations through legislation or to indulge in nostalgia for family values and forms of the past. More intelligent policies must be devised, however, to assist single mothers in their care and socializing tasks, to encourage without coercion paternal commitment to children in all cultural groups and, above all, to engage in long-term strategies, based on the best knowledge available, to help families provide optimal environments for rearing children. Obviously, public education about family processes must be part of those strategies.

family structure are symptomatic of much deeper social change. Available figures indicate that in the rural societies of the developing world, which account for over 40 per cent of the world's families and well over half of the world's children, traditional values and practices are being disrupted. Formerly, these societies and their families had succeeded in the essential task of socializing children. Being largely isolated and immobile, they provided an environment where children learned their future roles through prolonged observation of parental and community models. Because life was hard and society stable, the young were socialized by being well-integrated into the ongoing struggle for survival.

Today, technological advances have opened rural society to a host of transforming influences. Easy to identify is the exposure of rural youth to media promoting urban models and values that weaken respect for traditional ones. The changes are more profound, however, than the eternal problem of restless youth. Agribusiness and the money economy have replaced the age-old exchange of goods and services that characterized family farming and governed relationships within the family and at the village level. In addition, mass migration from the countryside to the cities has disrupted traditional social structures, including the extended family model and its child-rearing functions.*

### *3. Growing impoverishment of families*

Reinforcing the breakdown in family structure is the growing impoverishment of families in the majority of countries. In the North, a far greater part of society's resources are allocated to older people and their health and pension needs. With the exception of the Nordic countries and some other European Union countries, economic transfers to families for maternal and child health, child care, family allowances and social security, school subsidies for meals and books etc. have decreased in recent years. Families, particularly single females with young children, find themselves caught in the poverty trap. Thereafter, their children live in impoverished home environments, often accentuated by prolonged maternal neglect. In the South, the problems are multiple. Great harm is done to countless families by wars, droughts, famines and forced migrations. The very fact of having children is now becoming, in many countries, a major cause of chronic impoverishment. The greatly increased costs of health and schooling place an insupportable burden on the shoulders of parents, who are obliged to keep their children away from school when child labour is essential for the family's survival. For a variety of reasons, the education of girls suffers most in such circumstances. Female illiteracy further reinforces the vicious cycle of population increase, poverty and environmental degradation that so bedevils developing economies.

### *4. The inadequacy or loss of parenting knowledge*

All societies have their child-rearing patterns, which are generally passed on through sociocultural norms and interaction with family relations and neighbours. Such patterns are a part of the shared system of skills, knowledge, needs and values that form a culture. In traditional societies, girls in particular learned parenting skills by observing their mothers and minding their younger sisters and brothers, ideally with supervision from those mothers or older women and support from extended family members and the community. Today, in the burgeoning urban world and increasingly in rural areas, this is no longer the case: extended family ties have loosened and mothers are obliged to leave home to grow food or earn income. Unsupervised child-minding by children is common, and traditional child-rearing knowledge is progressively lost. In this process of knowledge wastage, as the growing phenomenon of street children illustrates, the traditional understandings of ideal human qualities, of social roles and work distribution within a society are also lost [5], understandings that greatly help the social integration of the child.

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*The extended family model, rooted in long settlement and the customary exchanges of the rural economy, frequently loses its operational nature in the city. It can be recreated, however, in urban settings when there is continuity of residence by several family generations in the same neighbourhoods.

Similarly, in industrialized countries, learning about parenting in the home can no longer be taken for granted as many families are composed of one child or of two children near in age. Child-rearing is shared between day-care services and parents. Appropriate knowledge is gleaned by young parents from books on the subject or from experienced relatives and friends. In their absence, or in the case of mothers who cannot read or are reluctant to do so, the risks of inadequate interaction with the child, malnutrition and ill health are greatly intensified. Societies must now teach consciously the parenting knowledge that was once absorbed unconsciously by children living in traditional societies.

## II. Education in the world

In both the developing and industrial worlds, the profound changes in social and family structure just described find a parallel in education. The reports on education in the twenty-first century prepared by the Delors Commission for UNESCO speak of "upheavals" taking place in education systems against a background of unprecedented social and technological change [6].

In this section, the principal educational needs of developing and industrial societies will be outlined and the new vision of education proposed by the World Conference on Education for All at Jomtiem, Thailand, in 1990 will be examined. At the same time, however, it will be recognized that formal, traditional education has had a powerful impact on the well-being of children and families through its emphasis on educating girls and promoting universal ideas. Despite its weaknesses, State education has generally acted as a counterbalance against objectionable community and family practices inherited from the past.

### A. The majority world: inadequate access to basic education

The World Conference on Education for All, convened in 1990 by UNESCO, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank, focused world attention on basic education and its vital importance in the achievement of essential civil, economic and social goals. A basic objective of the Conference was to alert the world community to the deterioration of educational access throughout the developing world.* The figures speak for themselves: almost 150 million children worldwide are deprived of schooling, and of the children who are enrolled, almost half drop out before becoming fully literate or numerate. Nearly one billion adults, two thirds of whom are women, are illiterate, while one third of the world's adults have insufficient access to knowledge, the printed word, skills and technologies that could improve the quality of their lives and help them adapt to the rapid changes their world is undergoing. Even in a country as highly developed as the United States, it is estimated that there are as many adults in need of basic education as the entire school population of 50 million children.

### B. A new vision of education: basic lifelong education aimed at essential life skills

The main thrust of the World Conference on Education for All at Jomtiem was to mobilize governments to launch a worldwide programme in favour of basic education. In its essential form, basic education was conceived as a four-year, concentrated primary cycle of education that would provide all children with basic reading, writing, arithmetic and life skills. However, it should go beyond the traditional three Rs to embrace the key development tasks that a society has to ensure. Of these tasks, the teaching of literacy and numeracy to the widest number of children is considered essential to future economic development and to participation by the widest number in the democratic processes. This must be accompanied by the teaching of other essential life skills, e.g. school and community health, food production and preparation, nutrition and family health and hygiene, and by the provision of clean water. The choice of life skills depends on the development priorities of a society, but whatever the choice, a break has been made with the academic approach of the Western-type school, which was often felt to be irrelevant to rural concerns [7]. Local communities are now encouraged to participate in and manage their own educational bodies.

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*The following paragraphs should be seen, however, against a background of tremendous educational gains all over the world from the 1950s to the 1980s, e.g. the enrolment rates for primary schooling in Africa doubled in that period, from 33 per cent in 1960 to 60 per cent in 1985. Thanks to the concerted efforts of governments and international agencies, enrolment trends are again on the increase in most countries, with a much improved intake of girls. However, there is a danger in several countries that the educational system cannot be sustained. This is particularly so in Africa, where economies are extremely poor and child populations remain high.

**Community primary education in Mali**

**Challenge**. Owing to the ever-increasing numbers of young children to be schooled and an overly centralized approach to educational planning, formal primary education was declining in Mali in the early 1990s. In one school district, for example, even with 43 classes functioning on double shifts, the 49 primary schools of the district could enrol only 3,745 new students for the beginning of the school year 1993-1994, leaving 47,000 six- to eight-year-olds without school places (a recruitment rate of 7 per cent). Because of lack of funding, trained personnel and teachers, the Ministère de l'éducation de base (MEB) was obliged to delay or refuse the request of communities to open new schools.

**Response**. In response to the problem, Save the Children, supported by MEB and the United States Agency for International/Development Mali, developed a model of community education for the Kolondieba district based on three assumptions:

- Primary education costs could be drastically reduced with significantly reducing quality.
- Given proper training, each community already has within its means the financial and human resources necessary to provide highly relevant primary education for its own children.
- The Malian national political climate is conducive to the decentralization of education and to developing dynamic partnerships between the Government, non-governmental organizations and communities.

**The Mali community school model.** Already the community school is the main provider of primary education in the district, with 46 new schools launched (16 more schools were launched in another district). Some of the main features of the schools are as follows:

- Buildings are built by the local community, with Save the Children supplying school equipment, latrines etc.
- Teachers are recruited from the village, drawing on those who have had some schooling or literacy training. They receive one month of initial training and an annual two-week in-service course. They are supervised and supported by weekly visits from MEB and Save the Children educational staff and are paid a salary determined by the village.
- Children attending pay monthly US$ 0.20, their writing materials and books being supplied by Save the Children. They are recruited from the village and placed in two classes of 30 children each. Emphasis is placed on recruiting girls.
- The curriculum stresses literacy and numeracy in the mother tongue (French instruction is optional from the third year) and knowledge of village life, health, work and enterprise.
- The school is managed by a committee of selected village leaders and parents.

*Source*: J. DeStefano, *Community-based Primary Education: The Experience of the BEEP Project in Mali* (Washington, D.C., USAID, 1995).

Basic education is lifelong, that is, it is directed towards meeting the educational needs of both adults and children, at any or all stages of life. It takes a multisectoral approach to target populations, education channels and delivery points for education. It includes, for example, non-formal education for children and adults, especially women, not reached by schools; it promotes the expansion of early childhood care and education services using the skills of mothers and local paraprofessionals.

The formal education system and local school remain the primary means of delivering basic education, but education must be reinforced at all delivery points and among all age groups. Family planning, health care, parenting skills, infrastructure projects, food production, water supply, development activities for women: all must be used to raise the educational levels of communities. In short, there is a need not just

for a reform of the primary school system but also for a comprehensive rethinking of how to define national education. Clearly, the formal schooling model is inadequate for addressing the educational, economic and social issues faced by the developing world.

### C. Education in the industrial world: a weakening of socialization

Although access to education is much better in the North, the situation of public education there is far from ideal. While children enjoy better health, higher standards of living and longer life expectancy than ever before, there is growing dissatisfaction with schooling in many countries. Mass education is criticized for having too low a standard and for failing to arrest the growth of an underclass. More and more casualties of national education systems are appearing, not only in the growing ranks of barely literate youth who leave school as early as possible but also in the spiralling delinquency figures in the poorer areas of large cities. Education reforms have become commonplace in Western democracies, but it may be doubted that they always achieve the results intended. Many reasons are put forward to explain dissatisfaction with schooling, but the one that is relevant here is the inadequate socialization of children by both the family and the school.

The history of education in the nineteenth century in Europe is that of a movement towards universal primary education and socialization by the State. As public education became a policy objective for industrializing States, education was gradually taken out of the hands of parents and communities and parents were required to send their children for the greater part of each day to attend the local religious or public schools. Most parents performed this duty with enthusiasm, seeing literacy and formal instruction as the requirements for entry into industry and the world of work. Formal education included a strong element of socialization based on intense school discipline, moral or religious instruction and the inculcation of civic and national values.

Since the Second World War, however, education systems, while retaining the instructional and training aspects of education, have tended to abandon their socialization aspects. Practical considerations such as the growing number of pupils and pressures to include scientific and technical subjects in the curricula have led schools to concentrate on academic achievement. In addition, the ideological nature of the nineteenth century school has been transformed by the decline of State religions and the rise of laicity, by the débâcle of European nationalism in the first half of the century and, more recently, by growing multiculturalism. While this movement away from dogmatism and nationalism is, without doubt, positive, it has created a vacuum. Schools are reluctant (except in later classes, when literature, citizenship and philosophy are studied) to orient children or to help them examine values and behaviour. In fact, some critics of public schooling would argue that the socialization of children in schools and the teaching of values has been reduced to an absolute minimum: some patriotic or civic information, respect for the school hierarchy, the acceptance of discipline and, in the best instances, the inculcation of good work habits.*

In parallel, the influence of the extended family on the child has declined greatly, its formative place being taken by media, peer culture and other socializing agents. There has been a real diminution of family responsibility for socializing and educating the individual child. Because of the pressures of the workplace, parents increasingly pass their responsibility to the kindergarten and the school. At the same time, they perceive that the main purpose of school is for their children to collect formal educational certificates, even to the extent of measuring their own success as parents by that yardstick. The emotional balance and

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*Traditionally, teachers participated in the socialization of children by inculcating honesty, good work habits and perseverance. Faced, however, with unfavourable staff-pupil ratios, the bureaucratization of school systems, student hostility and, in many countries, insufficient training, many teachers confine themselves to formal instruction.

internal congruence of children, their ability to learn, their personal value systems, their willingness to participate in and contribute to their social group are given less emphasis.

Communities, likewise, have given insufficient attention to child socialization. It is only in recent years that urban planners are again turning their attention to making the urban environment more child-friendly and to giving it streets and parks that can be places of socialization for children. The realization is growing that socialization is carried out not just by the family but also by specific agencies within the community. These agencies are both informal (the extended family, neighbours and the neighbourhood)* and formal (kindergartens, schools, supervised recreation centres, shelters for children). However, the social groups among whom dysfunctions of family and neighbourhood are common are also the groups less likely to use the formal socializing points or to use them for significantly shorter periods.

The picture presented here is, perhaps, excessively sombre. Many schools offer excellent courses both in civics (rights and duties of citizens, understanding democracy, education for tolerance, environmental education) and personal development (ethical or religious education, sex education, relationships training etc.). In addition, the "hidden" curriculum of schools (hierarchical organization, long hours without movement, obligatory concentration) teaches children to conform and obey. Yet, the relative contributions of parents, communities and schools to the socialization of children is an issue that must be addressed, without nostalgia for the past or making a scapegoat of public education. The evidence points, in fact, to the conclusion that formal education systems have contributed enormously to child and family well-being.

## D. Formal education and family well-being

Despite the weaknesses of academic education there is little doubt that the educational levels achieved have been a key factor in raising economic productivity, which in turn has significantly improved a variety of human development indicators, e.g. life expectancy, infant mortality, child development, family size, status of women, access to health services. Of particular relevance to family concerns are two means by which education systems improve family well-being and, in particular, enhance the girl child's chances of successful personal development.

### *1. The education of girls*

Formal education promotes the education of girls, which, in turn, greatly influences human development indicators and school outcomes for children. Numerous studies, among them that of King and Hill [8], have shown that continued education for women and girls significantly reduces infant and maternal mortality, increases community knowledge of nutrition and health skills, brings about a striking fall in birth rates and improves the economic well-being of families and communities. These effects of education become apparent after six or seven years of schooling. After that length of time, not only has literacy been acquired but, even more importantly, one of the major messages of schooling has been assimilated: that life can be improved through a more rational and controlled approach to it. Hence, it should not be surprising to find that three of the crucial variables in predicting educational outcomes for a child depend on the educational capacity of mother and family, namely, the educational and income level of the mother; the quality of care and interaction provided to the child, starting from conception, and the quality of family and community support for the child's learning at school.

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*The neighbourhood – its physical state, its amenities, the lawfulness of its streets, the sense of cohesion of its families and its expectations – is potentially a strong socializing agency.

### 2. *Universal ideas*

Formal education promotes universal ideas that greatly improve societal and family attitudes to children and women. Despite their weaknesses, State-mandated curricula are often a fairer and more progressive force for children than families and communities. For reasons of tradition or economic survival, families have often exploited and abused their weaker members. Many families live in misery and ignorance, their horizons bounded by the constant struggle to survive or the desire to relieve the pain of existence. In such circumstances, women and children are constantly exploited and mistreated. According to one estimate [4], over half the physical violence against women takes place at the hands of a close family member, generally a husband. Most child labour, child abuse and the selling of children into bondage or prostitution is perpetrated by families. Whole communities even can be highly intolerant and abusive. Public education is a powerful tool against such abuse and has proven its ability to transform social attitudes and abolish reprehensible practices.*

These two outcomes of formal education systems are immensely significant, so promoters of adult and family life education should not underestimate the importance of schooling. On the other hand, as Don Edgar, the former director of the Australian Institute for Family Studies, has pointed out in numerous articles and books, it is unproductive to focus exclusively on school-based programmes when research indicates that family processes and participation in the education of children greatly enhance the impact of schooling and improve its quality.

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*Reprehensible practices against girls and women are many: practices relating to marriage consent and age; non-registration of female children, even murder at birth; mutilation; denial of education; sexual harassment; forced prostitution, bondage, inhuman workloads; unjust divorce and inheritance laws.

# III. Family education

Chapter I provided a brief overview of families throughout the world, their typical modes of functioning and their need, in the face of difficulties, for education and support in rearing their children. Chapter II described some of the problems of education in the developing and developed worlds as well as the promise held out by a new vision of basic education, namely, that it would make education more relevant to people's concerns and provide lifelong opportunities to learn basic skills and competencies, including family education, that is, the body of knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to meet the basic needs of family members and, in particular, to raise and educate children.

## A. Towards a definition of family education

According to Thomas and Arcus [9], the purpose of family education is "to strengthen and enrich individual and family well-being". Family education has the aim of raising the competence of family members, of improving the family environment, of preparing family members to journey with skill and wisdom through the different life stages: infancy, early childhood, schooling, early relationships, committed partnerships, parenthood and grandparenthood. Learning to live again as a couple, to become supportive grandparents or to prepare for declining health and death call for deep personal readjustments, which can be facilitated by education and exchanges with people of experience. It is a continuing process in which, ideally, major inputs are made at key moments throughout the life cycle, but especially during childhood, which is the crucial stage of human development. Attitudes, skills and habits built up in childhood, such as self-esteem, perseverance, bonding, cooperation, communication skills, curiosity, problem-solving and the individualization of the imagination and the intellect, form the basis for successful schooling and adult living. The process continues, of course, during formal and informal learning in school (learning to learn and solve problems; discovering social relationships and networks; formal instruction in nutrition, health and sex education);* during adolescence in relationship training and social consciousness-raising; at the time of preparation for marriage; during pre- and post-natal care; in parent-school relations; at crisis moments, such as marriage mediation,** child discipline or juvenile justice cases;*** and at moments of transition from one life-cycle period to another. The learning process takes place, therefore, in many settings: in the home, in preschools and in schools, in health and family planning clinics, in doctors' offices, in parent and women's groups, in adult education courses, in short, in a variety of informal, non-formal and formal**** educational settings.

Family education comprises a very large body of knowledge. Generated by observation and experience, it is transmitted through a wide variety of agents: by parent modelling and precept; by care and

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*See, for example, *The Health of Young People*, by the World Health Organization (WHO) [10]. The healthy schools programme of WHO is an interesting initiative that brings together schools, families and communities to work for the bodily and mental health of children. For further information, contact the Health Education and Health Promotion Unit, WHO, Geneva, Switzerland.

**Marriage crises offer an opportunity to marriage partners to grow personally and to clarify their commitment to each other and their children, but in many societies, personal understanding is impeded by the adversarial mechanisms for handling disputes. To shore up the huge increase in marriage breakdown, many countries are now requiring mediation before lawyers may be brought in.

***One example of effective family mediation is the Family Group Decision-Making Model, which has become mandatory in New Zealand in juvenile justice cases, when a breakdown in the socializing function of the family becomes apparent. The family is brought together to reflect on family processes and to consider how it can assist the young offender.

****Brief definitions of these terms, which often overlap, are as follows:

*Informal education*: learning takes place outside a structured learning situation, without the learner making any conscious effort to learn.

*Non-formal education*: any non-school learning situation where the learner and the source of learning have the conscious intent of promoting learning in a structured and progressive manner.

*Formal education*: learning takes place in a school or recognized academic institute, according to a fixed curriculum taught by certified teachers using standard pedagogical methods, generally to age-graded classes of children or young adults.

education centres; by medical, social work and educational professionals; by parent support groups both informal and non-formal; by the media (specialized publications, radio, video and television); by distance education; and by traditional practices. It is practical in aim, seeking not so much to provide theory to family members as to upgrade skills, attitudes and practical knowledge.

### B. The content of family education

Despite cultural variations, there exist in all countries common human needs that must be met. Such needs are both universal and age-specific. Universal needs* embrace survival needs (material security, food, shelter and health) but include also education, social participation and freedom from discrimination. Age-specific needs are the psychosocial needs at the various life stages. They are what Erikson calls the cycle of epigenetic development, that is, the psychosocial adaptations that normally occur as a child or adult moves from one stage of life to another and in which learning and interaction play a central role [12]. Both types of need are culture-linked: food intake, human life cycles, community expectations, values and even, as Vygotsky shows, cognitive modes can differ significantly from one culture to another [13]. Hence the need for educators to understand what family well-being and values may mean within the context of a specific culture or socio-economic situation.

In parts of the developing world where survival is a daily concern, family well-being may be defined in terms of the satisfaction of universal needs: food, shelter, health, education and social participation. The satisfaction of these needs depends to a great extent on the information and behaviours necessary for family survival, e.g. food production skills, house-building and basic infrastructure skills, ability to manage resources, knowledge about nutrition, reproductive health, family planning, primary health care and child-rearing.

In the industrialized world, where universal needs are met (often through services provided by the State), family well-being is defined in psychosocial terms. Thus, the main elements of family education in the North are parenthood and child-rearing, supporting children's learning, human development and sexuality, life-stage changes, family processes and interpersonal relationships.** Questions of family health, resource management and even child education are left in the hands of a providential State, which is expected to set stringent standards in these areas.

As family education aims primarily at the empowerment of parents or care givers, it may include issues such as family enterprise training or broad societal issues relevant to parents and children, e.g. community renewal projects or programmes to prevent AIDS or substance abuse. In family education, parents are helped to confront the problems raised by social and cultural change or to respond to new opportunities created by technical and scientific advances.

### C. The core of family education: family life education and parent education

The core elements of family education shift according to circumstances and target group, e.g. family education aimed at contemporary adolescents may take sex education as a key issue and may emphasize

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*Universal needs are often measured by social indicators such as those in the UNICEF publication *The Progress of Nations*, which ranks countries in terms of health, nutrition, education, family planning and progress for women [11]. Not to be forgotten are the special needs of children, as reflected in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

**It may be recalled that owing to structural dysfunctions in the economic system or to lack of a just social vision on the part of governments, certain social groups are excluded or marginalized in the developed countries. Their needs with respect to family life education will be different and resemble more the needs of developing societies. Family life education directed towards such groups must therefore focus on basics: family health and nutrition, resource management, child-rearing and educational support.

AIDS prevention. In the developing world, where much child-minding is done by children, a family education programme might take older siblings as a natural target group. The Child-to-Child Programme has shown that young children are fully capable of absorbing basic health and child-rearing principles.* The chief characteristics of family education in developing and developed countries are outlined next.

### *1. The developing world*

Although a great varie*y of themes are addressed by family educators in different developing countries, family life education and parenting education are at the heart of all of them. Because of difficult socio-economic conditions, such education concentrates on essentials.

#### *Family life education*

Family life education in developing countries focuses on population, nutrition and reproductive health. Chapter I referred to the danger that overpopulation poses for human ecology, global economic growth and education systems. For this reason, population education for both men and women is considered a priority in family life programming and, according to the United Nations Population Conference, which took place in 1994 at Cairo, it should become an essential part of general education curricula.** Reproductive health is also a critical issue in the developing world because of AIDS or threats to the health of child-bearing women. Maternal health is endangered by multiple pregnancies, which often lead to chronic morbidity and to child malnutrition and neglect, especially for girls. In infants, it is the compounding of poor maternal health in pregnancy and post-natal malnutrition that cause the greatest damage to brain and bodily development. The roots of school failure – poor health, sight and hearing defects, low learning ability – are often implanted in the crucial period from conception to two years. Unwanted children are extremely vulnerable and likely to be at higher risk. By contrast, the rewards attached to safe motherhood and well-spaced births are great. Public health, education and the national economy all improve when there is a better match between resources and the population base. Mothers are healthier and have more time to care for and educate fewer children, who, in turn, are more robust, better nourished and more likely to succeed in school.

#### *Teaching parents essential child-rearing skills*

The emphasis of child-rearing programmes in the developing world is on maintaining nutritional and primary health for example, on giving birth to healthy babies, on providing them with adequate food, on protecting them against disease and on creating a healthy, safe environment for children, rather than on developmental issues. Essential as these objectives are, Myers' book points out the shortcomings of concentrating on physical well-being only [14]. Health care, feeding and personal development are intimately connected. Armed with a little knowledge and insight, mothers can be encouraged to use moments of care to interact with their children and thus promote their psychosocial and cognitive development. Happily, many of the better "interaction" programmes, e.g. the MISC program [15], are now being adapted to conditions in the developing world.

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*The Child-to-Child Programme, c/o Institute of Child Health, 30 Guildford Street, London WC1N 1EH, is a health education movement for children, particularly in the developing world. It provides ideas and materials on topics important for child and community health in a manner that can be understood and acted on by children. Children are seen not just as learners but as educators of siblings, families, schools and communities. The topics of Child-to-Child activity sheets are grouped under child growth and development; nutrition; personal and community hygiene; safety; recognizing and helping the disabled; preventing and curing disease.

**See, for example, the publications of the joint inter-agency programme of UNESCO, the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP): Environment and Population Education and Information for Human Development, UNESCO, 7 place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris. Population dynamics are far from simple and the exact causes of population reduction in nations are not always clear. Among the probable causes are improved educational standards, especially for women, improved public health and child mortality rates, urbanization, information and access to birth-control means.

**Facts for Life**

***Facts for Life***, a booklet on essential maternal and child health information published by UNICEF, has been integrated into over 40 school curricula throughout the world. More significantly, the text is seen not just as a source of information for children but has been taken over and revised by some 200 countries as part of their national health education programmes. It is used extensively by community health workers, child-to-child groups, paramedical personnel and other development agents working in the most diverse milieus. In short, it has become part of a progressive agenda for action which is gradually becoming part of the child-rearing patterns of traditional cultures. The following, taken from the 1993 edition, are its most important messages on child development:

- Babies begin to learn rapidly from the moment they are born. By age two, most of the growth of the human brain is already complete. For good mental growth, the child's greatest need is the love and attention of adults.
- Play is important to a child's development. By playing, a child exercises mind and body and absorbs basic lessons about the world. Parents can help a child to play.
- Children learn how to behave by imitating the behaviour of those closest to them.
- Young children easily become angry, frightened and tearful. Patience, understanding and sympathy with the child's emotions will help the child grow up happy, well balanced and well behaved.
- Children need frequent approval and encouragement. Physical punishment is bad for a child's development.
- The foundations of learning well in school can be built by parents in the earliest years of a child's life.
- A parent is the best observer of a child's development. Thus, all parents should know the warning signs that mean a child is not making normal progress and something may be wrong.

### *2. The developed world*

In the North, issues of reproductive health are also important, but they are generally taken in charge by State services,* while public education provides functional literacy to the great majority of school-going children. Instead, the focus is on parent education, which Pugh and De'Ath define as "a range of educational and supportive measures which help parents and prospective parents to understand themselves and their children and enhance the relationships between them" [16]. Four fields are particularly important: empowering parents; accessing and improving statutory services; sensitizing parents to support child development; sensitizing them to support child learning.

*Empowering parents*

In rearing their children, parents experience many hindrances, some completely outside their control. Other hindrances, such as lack of knowledge about fertility or sexually transmissible diseases, as well as feelings of inferiority coming from the relatively low status given to women and/or to child-rearing responsibilities, can be greatly helped by educational inputs.

*Because of a plentiful food supply, nutrition information is not taken in charge to the same extent by Western governments. Consequently, there are a growing number of nutrition-related disorders in children in the developed world.

**ACEPP: Day care and parent empowerment**

Day-care services in France are of excellent quality, but many observers remark their lack of outreach towards parents. In such circumstances, there is little possibility for uneducated immigrant mothers, inhibited by their status as women and their situation at the bottom of French society, to enter into dialogue with the professional carers of their children. Their command of French is poor and their knowledge of child-rearing is generally intuitive. Though obviously the municipal child-care service is of great use, the disempowerment of immigrant mothers is driven home to them each morning when they hand over their children to an institution whose culture and organization are foreign to their world.

In 1986, ACEPP (Association des collectifs enfants, parents et professionnels), 15 rue de Charolais, 75012 Paris, was founded to address this and other problems of day care. In ACEPP projects, immigrant parents are fully associated with the setting up of services. Great flexibility in management is encouraged to allow mothers to involve themselves as much as possible in the care of their children. While taking into account the educational level of the parent and her/his socio-economic difficulties, the reception of the child each morning is linked with awareness-raising and support of parental responsibility.

The nursing and educational staff are specially trained in intercultural issues and are able to welcome parents, to speak with mothers about their difficulties and their hopes for their children, to encourage them to engage in child-care activities. Working groups of parents and professionals are established to explore and confront neighbourhood problems and help in the social integration of immigrant families.

*Source:* Josette Combes, *Les crèches parentales*, in Tessier [17].

One essential aim of family education is to empower parents. In personal terms,* empowerment means having self-esteem, feeling competent about parenting and entering more deeply into the adventure of the child's life as the child journeys from one developmental stage to the next. In social terms, it means parents taking control over their own resources and environment. Competent parents know how important they are to their children, recognize that they are "good-enough" parents and have the capacity to interact effectively with a range of people and services so as to successfully fill their family and workplace roles.** Empowerment may be judged from the ability of a parent to cater for family needs, to exercise freely his or her legal rights and responsibilities and to make use of the available economic and social resources. It is manifested by self-organization and by the quality and quantity of resources marshalled to achieve parental tasks. Training in empowerment also includes preparation for the conflicts that empowerment entails, e.g. gender conflict and social group conflict.***

*Accessing and improving statutory services*

The modern industrial State provides wide-ranging services and information for families in the domains of health, work, education, leisure etc. An essential part of family education will be to train parents how to access and improve these services. Among the most important services for family and child well-being is the monitoring of maternal and child health from pregnancy through the early school years. A real window of opportunity exists for family education in this period. Medical or paediatric monitoring can be made the occasion for imparting information and knowledge to young mothers. The *carnet de maternité* supplied to expectant mothers and the *carnet de santé* supplied for each child by the social security system

*For the limits of personal empowerment training, see chapter IV, where some contextual constraints on family functioning are outlined.

**One author identifies seven roles that mothers normally have to fulfil: parental role, occupational role, conjugal role, domestic role, kin role, community role and individual role.

***Democracy is characterized by a multitude of small conflicts over roles, positions and control of resources, conflicts that are managed without violence or illegality.

in France are examples of what can be done to lend a certain status to maternity and child care at little cost. Dialogue with doctors and nurses and follow-up on maternal issues within peer groups would reinforce the education process.

A second important opportunity for parent education is the first contact with statutory or voluntary early childhood and school services (this will be covered in greater detail in the next section, on sensitizing parents to support child learning). A lesson that has been made clear by the ACEPP example is that a significant amount of education can be imparted to parents of young children if they are encouraged to participate in the care and education of those children.

*Sensitizing parents to support child development and competence*

As they grow from birth to adulthood, children develop their bodies and minds. They master ever more complex motor skills, social interactions and understandings of the world about them. The rate of development differs from child to child and is much influenced by social milieux and the surrounding culture. Childhood developmental stages can be expressed in psychoanalytic, behaviourist, maturationist or, increasingly, in interactionist terms. By interactionist is meant the theory that although programmed genetically to mature in stages, the child is helped or hindered by the quality of the interaction provided by its environment.

The developmental support that parents can provide at each stage of the child's development has been described in numerous books and articles.* The better contemporary studies have moved away from describing universal stages of child development, which are often too abstract and generalized to be of much use to parents. The focus now is on sensitizing parents to listen to and interact with their children so that they can learn what the child needs at first hand, that is to say, the focus is on the practice of care, observation and interaction. Universal child needs and developmental stages can then be discussed when parents want or need to know more, but care is taken not to exclude either the insights of mothers or community child-rearing patterns, unless they are obviously harmful to the child. Reasons for this attitude of respect for parent experience are both politic and cultural. Work with parents is normally voluntary and participatory. Unless there is a compelling need to do so, the imposition of child-rearing models or programmes from without undermines participation and self-realization, which is one of the essential aims of working with disadvantaged parents.

Another essential understanding for family educators is that child-rearing is not just a question of individual psychology and family socialization. Child development, and its conclusion in a meaningful adult life, is oriented and limited by the socio-cultural setting. The social distribution of work in a society, family notions about ideal outcomes for a child and the tacit cultural contracts that regulate the form, content and meaning of interaction between the care giver and the child, greatly influence the child's destiny [5]. In short, before plunging into family education programmes, educators need to listen to parents so as to discover what life-careers are realistically possible for children from this community, what the roads are to such careers and what aspects of family education need reinforcing to help parents place their children on these upward roads. The genetic and social programming of the child's destiny should not, however, discourage attempts at family education. The child's passage through each stage of development can be helped greatly by loving and informed interaction with care givers. Hence, it is appropriate to involve parents and educate them and to follow the development of their children. Indeed, excluding them would be to grossly underestimate the commitment they can bring to child rearing and their capacity to effect social change.

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*The comprehensive, four-volume *Handbook of Parenting*, edited by Marc H. Bornstein, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, is an outstanding contribution to the subject [18].

Unfortunately, given the inflexible work schedules of the North and the excessive workloads of mothers in developing economies, parents are often unable to give children the time and attention they need. Some nations have responded to the crisis by providing support to parents, e.g. they subsidize employers to allow parents prolonged work breaks, provide professional or community child-care services or simply encourage extended family, shared local community or voluntary child care. Whatever option or combination of options is chosen, it is becoming clear that the neglect of interaction, or what Bornstein calls the widespread practice of "non-existent child care", in which infants or young children are simply left unattended while parents are otherwise engaged, seriously undermines healthy child development [18].

*Sensitizing parents to support child learning*

Support for a child's learning obviously changes according to age. In the infant years, support consists essentially of providing health and a caring, interactive environment for the child. There should be much physical and verbal contact with the child. Allowing and encouraging the infant's curiosity and desire to explore is, according to educationalists, important for future learning. From the time a child is born, its father becomes a significant adult in its universe and the child turns to the father particularly for play and affiliation [19]. The basic principles of educational interaction with children at this and later ages are outlined in Klein and Hundeide [15]:

- The care giver should assist the child to focus and direct its attention by adjusting her or his attention to what is interesting for the child.
- The care giver should help give meaning to the child's environment by pointing, talking, naming and showing enthusiasm.
- The care giver should tell the child stories that explain the child's world and relate events, perceptions, explorations to each other in a wider context.
- The care giver should build the child's self-esteem by loving interaction and by naming the achievements of the child.
- The care giver should help the child to achieve autonomy and self-control by encouraging it to plan, initiate and regulate activities.

In the preschool stage, play ensures the optimal cognitive development of the child by exercising mind, imagination and body. Talking to young children, reading to them and encouraging their play are excellent methods of preparing the child for language acquisition and literacy. As the research carried out by the High/Scope Foundation has shown [20], the environments of home and neighbourhood, no matter how modest, are generally quite sufficient to stimulate the child. The "key experiences" in which children need to engage – creativity, language use, social interaction, music and movement, classification, seriation, number, space and time – take place naturally through the child's interaction with family, neighbours and peers.* Children have key experiences daily and rehearse them naturally in their play. Greater meaning is brought to the experiences by the presence of an attentive parent or adult who will, if necessary, orient children toward the key experiences, be a witness of the child's doing and mediate the child's experience back to him or her through appropriate language.

At the school stage, parents (particularly educated parents) will often concentrate on following the academic subjects treated in school. This approach can help the young child to learn and to obtain good grades. Education is more, however, than obtaining good grades: it involves all-round personal develop-

*These experiences are a distillation of the essential activities of the young child, seen from a cognitive development and child-centred perspective. They have been formulated by the High/Scope Foundation, a leading institute for early childhood education research and programming, based at 600 N. River Street, Ypsilanti, Michigan, United States.

ment, the individuation of mind and imagination, the building of character and the forming of children to love and to work. In his parent education course, Tanner shows that the support of child learning calls for sustained effort from parents [21]. They need themselves to value learning and education and to engage in enjoyable learning experiences regularly with their child; to understand their child at each development stage and, from the beginning, to nurture self-esteem and good study habits; to learn the requirements of the school and create fruitful home-school partnerships; to foster in their children, through modelling and precept, the attitudes and habits that underlie successful studies, namely, self-esteem, self-organization, outgoing contact with knowledge sources, perseverance. Rich stresses that rather than coaching children in academic subjects, it may be more important for parents to help them to learn what she calls the "megaskills", that is the essential habits and attitudes that they need to do well both in school and in life [22]. These include self-confidence, motivation, effort, responsibility, initiative, perseverance, caring, teamwork, common sense, problem-solving. In line with High/Scope Foundation research, many educators of parents also stress the practical help that parents can provide informally to young children by encouraging them to join in play or domestic chores in which number, language or science concepts are in use.

Essential to all growth, however, is the loving link formed between the child and at least one significant care giver. Respect, degree of interest and care time given: all enhance the self-esteem of the child and its learning drive and capacity. Children sense manipulation very quickly and react negatively to stimulation or teaching where their whole good is not sought. Ambitious parents may obtain good academic results from their children, but the child's innate joy in learning and life can be easily quenched when love, respect and the giving of significant time are absent from the learning environment.

For various reasons, adolescence is a particularly difficult time for parents to support child learning. For one thing, the parent is often surpassed in knowledge by the adolescent child. In addition, an enormous gap can develop between the peer culture, school objectives and the world of adults. Parents must consciously shift their perspective in order to see their growing child as an individual who is capable of independent judgement and social consciousness. In passing from childhood to adulthood, the adolescent deeply desires independence and, in fact, depends less on family for emotional, social and cognitive development. Parents who seek to channel the desire for autonomy towards adult concerns may find this difficult. Unless they become apprenticed, adolescents have few opportunities for constructive work, except perhaps in rural societies. Casual summer work is often boring, poorly paid and offers little training. A more valid introduction to the adult world might entail giving adolescents responsibilities in the home and encouraging them to participate in community and home-school activities, which not only address school issues but also bring adolescents into contact with parents and their concerns. Work with such groups can help to sensitize adolescents, especially boys, to adult social issues and also to the rewards and responsibilities of raising children.

Examples of home-school partnerships are many, not only in the developing world, where they are customary, but also in the institutionalized education systems of the North. Home-school partnerships have been established to examine school discipline; to involve parents in assessment; to advise about pornography and violence in the media; to reflect on child development; to provide remedial classes for disadvantaged children; to establish child-care services for younger brothers and sisters; to improve school health; to provide additional care for handicapped children and those with special needs; to undertake literacy work with children of refugees and ethnic minorities; to provide holidays for children deprived of family; to form debating and play groups; to combat and prevent drug abuse. Such partnerships are shown to have a very positive effect on adolescent and family attitudes to schooling, particularly in disadvantaged communities.

Why, then, is there not more parental involvement in schooling? There is, in fact, considerable parent contact with kindergartens and schools, but generally at a superficial level. Parents respond to the invitation of teachers to supply materials and funds or to be present as helpers during out-of-school trips. Conscientious parents, too, will involve themselves by supporting the child's homework and by attending meetings. Only rarely, however, are parents and adolescents consulted on important learning and

disciplinary questions or are they involved in the classroom. Families and pupils are often disempowered by the school, and teachers are not trained to conduct outreach programmes.

Yet all over the world, educators are looking again at families in their own right as an important locus of education. Because family relationships are significant, deep and long-lasting, the fundamental aptitudes and habits of the person are formed in the home, e.g. the ability to defer immediate gratification, to make decisions and solve problems, to work cooperatively with others. Research shows too that the major developmental gains in a human life – physical, emotional, social and intellectual – are made in the early years. Later, as children are taken in charge by schools, they are helped or impeded in their learning more by family processes than by school variables.

**Parent schools in China**

**Context**. Parent schools were first established in China in the early 1980s to respond to the need to "educate the educators", that is, the 600 million parents who today have charge of the country's children. A major goal of these schools is to help parents support child learning by familiarizing them with the content and approach of school courses, but there are other goals as well: to understand family life and its importance in building up society, to promote the status of women by underlining the importance of their role *vis-à-vis* children; to raise the general level of education and literacy in Chinese families; to promote links between parents, schools and communities.

**Organization and operation of parent schools.** Today, parent schools in China number 240,000. Four general types exist, each with its typical objectives: parent schools run by schools or education departments, which encourage parent support for child learning in school; parent schools run by the community, which promote education in community values and the moral education of children; parent schools run by family research institutes, which disseminate more scientific information; parent schools run by specialized groups or institutions, e.g. hospitals, which run pregnancy and childbirth schools.

**Delivery of family education.** Except for the last-mentioned type of parent school, almost all parent education takes place in the evening in the local primary or secondary school. Many of the teachers are, in fact, the teachers of the children. They explain in detail to the parents what is expected of them in order to assist their children's school work. Other experts are also invited to speak on specialized topics. Courses are mainly free, with a $1 annual charge per parent to cover materials, certificates etc. Methods other than classroom teaching are also used to deliver parent education: expert consultations, parent support groups and correspondence courses (self-learning by parents is considered important in China). There are also radio and television broadcasts: the television lecture series *Family Education in China*, for example, is screened at prime time every Wednesday and Friday, while the many provincial and municipal radio stations broadcast various lectures on family education topics regularly. More than 500 new titles in family education have been published since the early 1980s.

**Evaluation.** According to the evaluation of these schools carried out for UNESCO by the China National Institute of Educational Research, parent schools, despite certain weaknesses, have achieved notable success in the following areas:

- Parent awareness of the importance of family education has been awakened, and self-learning by parents has greatly increased.
- Parental knowledge of child development stages has been much improved.
- The importance of the "three goods" – good childbirth, good upbringing, good education – has been widely disseminated throughout Chinese society.
- Graduates of parent education schools have a more harmonious relationship with spouses, children and grandparents and are more successful in rearing their children, neither treating them as "little emperors" nor returning to traditional constraints.
- Much-improved integration between home and kindergarten, school and community objectives, e.g. children of parent school graduates generally obtain excellent grades.

*Source*: *UNESCO, Evaluation of Parent Schools in China* (Paris, 1995).

## D. Contextual factors influencing family well-being

Of the contextual factors that influence family well-being and, in consequence, the potential impact of family education, five are especially important.

### *1. The political and social context*

Promoters of family education are greatly helped if the Government and the society are supportive of family well-being, particularly of families in disadvantaged social groups. Unfortunately, this support is not always present. In the past few decades, families worldwide have been weakened by growing impoverishment, the erosion of paternal responsibility and the dramatic change in the work patterns of women. An adequate response to the situation has still to be formulated. Because male wages have dropped in real terms since the 1960s, women have been obliged to join the labour market in ever greater numbers. Generally, they have had to take unskilled jobs with low status and low pay. There have been some adaptations in working practices to allow women to meet their child-rearing responsibilities, but they have been quite insufficient. For example, in the United States, according to UNICEF data, 60 per cent of working women have no benefits or job safeguards when they give birth.* As has already been argued in this occasional paper, without the political will of governments and societies, embodied in intelligent education programmes, the children of families caught in the poverty trap have little hope of escaping from the cycle of deprivation. According to Brofenbrenner, the situation requires "public policies and practices that provide place, time, stability, status, recognition, belief systems, customs and actions in support of child-rearing". In short, a new societal commitment to families is needed, a recognition of their essential role in the education of the new generations.

### *2. Economic growth that includes all sections of society*

In chapter II it was pointed out that impoverishment of families is a worldwide phenomenon. Even in richer societies, dysfunctions of the economy or the absence of social policies can leave significant sections of the population without the benefits of work and salary. Economic growth sufficient to provide employment and meaningful lives for the cohorts of children leaving their homes or schools is vitally important for the well-being of families. Demoralization and a breakdown in socialization take place rapidly in economically depressed societies or in marginalized sections of society: the phenomenon of abandoned infants in some eastern European countries or the growing numbers of street children in the great cities of the South reflect the despair of many families. However, a decent income is not in itself sufficient for family well-being: families also need meaningful work, health and education, a humanized environment and social networks. As Oscar Lewis noted [23], the culture of poverty and disempowerment is self-perpetuating and transmitted from one generation to the next; hence long-term, integrated programmes are needed to ensure equity of access for disadvantaged populations to education and employment.** Without economic opportunity and properly functioning neighbourhoods and schools, families are greatly impeded in their child-rearing tasks.

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*The figures for poorer countries are often worse. In European countries, on the other hand, good progress in providing workbreaks for parents or in establishing alternative child-care systems has been made.

**Since the publication of Lewis's book, the consequences of continuing poverty for families have been well documented: poor personal health; low educational achievement, including poor knowledge of nutrition, hygiene and health care; social isolation and a tendency to underutilize health and education services; a tendency to remain in the poverty trap through long-term unemployment; a tendency to become a parent at an early age; a greater likelihood of having high-risk babies. The psychological development of children from chronically poor backgrounds is frequently retarded, leaving them branded as slow learners by the age of four. Even more seriously, the poor prenatal health of mothers, premature or low-weight births, malnutrition and ill health at the infant stage, all endemic in very poor communities, mark the young child indelibly.

### *3. Adequate housing and community environments*

In the developing world, many families survive in urban neighbourhoods and streets without adequate housing or basic infrastructure. Although these situations are not quite so widespread in the West, it is clear that the renewal of housing stocks and urban neighbourhoods has become a pressing issue in many cities. Crowding, unhygienic conditions, excessive noise and high-crime neighbourhoods are all deleterious to family and child well-being. Even within the home, the physical and temporal structuring of the environment is important for the development of the child. When people are obliged to live in debilitating, degrading environments, it is difficult for them to respond to family education opportunities.

### *4. The educational level of the target population*

The vision of family education outlined in chapter IV recommends using the schools, peer or parent groups and government services as the main delivery points for family education. This would not only limit costs but would also impart the education in a face-to-face situation. Since education is reinforced when parents can read, parents who cannot read or are reluctant to read will be cut off from much information. Thus, reading, writing and numeracy are necessary skills in contemporary societies. Barely literate parents are often ignorant of how to provide a stimulating home environment for their children or are unable to guide their child's learning activities. In fact, in keeping with their limited achievements and expectations, they often transmit negative messages about the value of education [24]. They are, in addition, at a great disadvantage when they wish to access basic information or utilize social and family services. In short, the general level of education and literacy in a society is important for any educational enterprise.*

### *5. The family culture of the group*

In family therapy circles, the term family culture is often used to denote the typical processes, values or expectations of an individual family. Here, the term is used to denote the family structures, gender roles, child-rearing models, family ideals and social outcomes for children that prevail in a specific culture or social group. In multicultural societies whose laws and customs are grounded in an older, dominant culture, differences in family culture quickly become apparent and often draw an intolerant response. In the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, for example, studies of Caribbean, British and Indian ethnic groups showed marked differences in behaviour on what is becoming a politically sensitive issue: the increase in single mother rates and the dependency of these mothers on social security payments. Having children and rearing them is a collective enterprise that cannot be divorced from the gender roles in a specific culture or from the realistic choices open to young adults. Thus, for family education programmes to be effective, a knowledge of the family patterns and life expectations of the target group is necessary. Among the questions to be asked by family educators are the following:

- *Basic need issues in relation to the child.* What are the basic child needs that need to be addressed in this situation? Does the family culture have built-in biases against certain children, e.g. female children? How can the family environment be strengthened to provide for basic needs? How best can parents be helped to be aware of the development needs of children?

- *Family structure issues.* What is the prevailing family structure in this group? What is the average number of children? What are the usual living arrangements between men, their spouses and the children?** Do these arrangements serve an economic, social or cultural function? Are they viable

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*For this reason, particularly in the United States, family literacy initiatives based on intergenerational learning are blossoming. Targeting disadvantaged parents and children, educators have been devising programmes that nurture the emergent reading and writing skills of parents and young children and offer parents specific guidelines, materials and training to reinforce the schoolwork of their children.

**The *Co-ordinators' Notebook* [25] quotes a study by Buvinic et al. which found that a Chilean father was 17 times more likely to contribute to his child's maintenance if he and the mother were married.

or are they poorly adapted to the actual socio-economic realities? If so, how can families be helped to change and to socialize their children in another way?

- *Outcome issues in relation to the child.* What does adult success mean in this community for females? For males? What career choices are available or beginning to open up? What are the qualities of the ideal girl child and boy child? How can worthwhile careers be accessed? Is schooling relevant to accessing these careers and to the problems and challenges that these children face daily? What are the access skills that family education can help parents to identify and inculcate?

- *Gender issues.* What are the typical tasks performed by females in this family form? Have these tasks a high or a low status? Who rears the children? What are the tasks of men? What is the pattern of resource allocation?* What typically happens if a father leaves? Is there an extended family to help the mother? What legal protection have women with regard to ownership, inheritance, divorce, maintenance, custody of children, family violence, marriage and divorce laws? Can a more equitable pattern be established without upsetting important social values and functions?

- *Father issues.* Is a father's presence important for a child? What does good fathering mean in this social group? How are masculinity and femininity defined? What are the positive aspects of the male role? Can these aspects be oriented in favour of spouse and family support? Are there examples of good fathering in this social group that are looked on favourably by the group?

The central objectives of family education should not be lost: to help parents bring better health and nutrition to their families; to give children a loving, well-organized and interactive environment; to encourage parents to support their child's journey toward a meaningful and satisfying destiny.

## E. Reasons for government investment in family education

Is it proper for the State or local authorities to become involved in the private sphere? If men and women wish to have children, is it not their right, and responsibility, to rear their offspring as they see fit? Why should the taxpayer be obliged to subsidize families? The State, in fact, is already heavily involved in family affairs. The research volumes produced by the European Observatory of National Child Policies show the comprehensive nature of State intervention with regard to family in the European Union. Measures include fiscal policies; allowances and child support; child-care policies; child status, protection and participation; family and workplace policies; family and caretaking work (including a re-evaluation of household work); and laws on marriage and cohabitation, divorce and separation, fertility, parental status and representation. The reasons for such intervention are cogent and varied.

### *1. The social demand argument*

There is evidence that demand exists in all countries for some types of family life education, e.g. for sex education, particularly in relation to fertility control, the prevention of AIDS or teenage pregnancy. In developing countries, an enormous demand exists for simple information about the early development of the young child, basic health and hygiene measures, family income-generating activities, support for children's learning. That the huge demand there for education fails to be met should not be surprising: given the ever-increasing numbers of children to be educated, only the most basic educational services can be funded. In contrast, funding does exist in the North, but as will be seen below in the discussion of equity, the supply of continuing education in industrial societies is biased by market concerns. Only those

*Research shows that if mothers have charge of the family budget, 40 per cent more is spent on children than when fathers have charge.

countries with a long tradition of family education or with a pressing need to address family education themes, e.g. family breakdown or AIDS, have an expanding family education sector.

### 2. *The economic argument*

Few studies are available on the economic returns of family education, that is, on the correlation between the number of hours spent in family education and subsequent salary increments.* Still, there is broad agreement that children are an important social and economic asset and that the costs of ignoring social and family issues are, in the long term, far greater than the present costs of health care, social protection and education. While this paper calls attention several times to the need for programmes to compensate disadvantaged populations, the argument should not be seen only from a deficit or welfare perspective. There is growing evidence that early development programmes, together with parent education, have an important economic function, as they contribute to a child's readiness for school and its success in later life. Their preventive value to society can be judged by the High/Scope Perry Preschool study [20], which shows that for every dollar invested in high-quality preschool programmes involving parents, $7.16 was saved to the public exchequer by the avoidance of remedial education, delinquency or later social dependency. Recent research underlines that two interlinking conditions are operative here: the existence of a high-quality, active learning preschool programme and significant parent involvement, to sustain what young children gain from such programmes [26].

### 3. *The legal and equity argument*

The many family rights safeguarded by international law are covered in *The Family in International Human Rights Instruments* [27] and in J. Cots [28]. Of particular relevance to the present paper is the legal recognition of parents as the primary educators of children and the obligation of States to assist parents lacking the means to fulfil this role. The right to assistance is enunciated clearly in the Preamble to the Convention on the Rights of the Child:

> ... the family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community.

As guidance and education are two of the fundamental duties of parents outlined in the Convention, there can be little doubt that States Parties to the Convention must support parents in carrying them out by providing appropriate social services and education.

The basic education model in most countries is a social equity model, that is, a system regulated by government that attempts to provide access to all children without discrimination. In the more progressive countries, this model includes compensatory early education programmes to allow disadvantaged children to enter the primary school system with better chances of achieving school goals. In contrast, adult education is unevenly spread and only in certain countries is entitlement to such education guaranteed. In many instances, it has followed a free-market model, with industry and commerce being the major funders and providers of continuing vocational education. A consequence of this development is that training in occupational skills dominates, to the detriment of civic and general education, which are unable to compete

*One reason for the absence of data is the nature of family education, which is generally non-formal and phased. The length of time spent in learning family skills cannot, therefore, be easily measured. In addition, family education generally does not have fixed costs nor does parental work (normally, a mother's work) have a salary attached to it.

against corporate interests in securing funds.* Parents from neighbourhoods that are economically depressed or isolated, that is, parents who really need education, find themselves bypassed by continuing adult education. State or local government regulation is needed to orient the structures and dynamics of the adult education field both to protect the interests of educationally disadvantaged adults and to broaden the scope of adult education.

### *4. The educational argument*

Four educational arguments may be advanced to justify government support:

- There is an urgent need today to educate young parents in family issues and basic child-rearing skills, both in schools and through parenting education built into the maternity monitoring process conducted by the health sector. Chapter II spoke of how difficult it is, in all parts of the world, for families to hand down sufficient family and child-rearing knowledge to their children. The consequences have been extremely negative in terms of the permanency of family relationships and of child-rearing. In particular, the risk of difficult pregnancies, of inadequate interaction between mother and child, of malnutrition and of child neglect have increased greatly in poor socio-economic groups, particularly those in which single, teenage motherhood is common.

- Educational research increasingly testifies to the link between the educational level of the parents, particularly that of the mothers, and the learning achievement of their children. In its present form, the school is often unable to compensate for disadvantaged environments but instead tends to reproduce social inequality. Family indicators focused on mothers are the crucial variables in predicting educational outcomes for the child (see chapter II above). Educated families normally rear educated children.

- Parents are the primary educators of the child, that is, not only do they have the chief responsibility but they also are the first in time. Although the individual never ceases to learn and change, the learning curve in the early years is never equalled in succeeding years. Personal development is like a space rocket, with the greater part of the thrust and energy going into the first years of the child's existence. Fortunately, for the sake of equity, much of that development is programmed genetically and is arrested only in very adverse circumstances. The family serves as an environment in which the child can flourish and learn. It is therefore essential to invest in that environment and give parents enough information and support so that they can activate the child's developmental programme.

- Significant immediate benefits can accrue to children through even minimal education of parents. Many parents do not realize the profound influence a healthy diet and a regular home environment have on children. They do not realize that for their children to later have success with learning, they must model their children's values, social skills and curiosity about the world. They are unaware of the impact that talking to children has on their language acquisition, mental awareness and problem-solving abilities. Family life education can raise awareness of these issues and teach the corresponding skills.

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*A general weakness in education philosophy today is the lack of attention given to individual desire and development. State and occupational interests dominate the field of adult education. Yet, in today's complex and ever-changing world, access to continuing general education is a real personal need. In the course of a lifetime, the individual must navigate multiple life-cycle changes in family role, occupation and social participation.

# IV. Planning family education

Family education is a lifelong enterprise that supports the family member through the major life stages, in particular, the key stage of rearing healthy and competent children. It crosses disciplinary boundaries and varies according to situation and target group. Knowledge needed at different life stages is extremely varied and multidisciplinary, being derived from fields such as health, hygiene, nutrition, child development, psychology, mental health, human development, household management, education and social knowledge. Equally varied are the skills needed: survival in harsh conditions, emotional bonding between spouses, successful parenting, home management, community development. Many of these skills are bound up with a particular setting or culture. For this reason, family education initiatives must be culturally and socially sensitive.*

Family education is delivered in diverse settings and by a great variety of means. It takes place in the home, the school, health clinics, maternity clinics, the workplace etc. and is delivered in informal, non-formal and formal ways by family and neighbours, statutory and voluntary bodies. The means are varied and include parental modelling and precept; school courses in sex education, biology, health and relationships; the media (radio, television, newspaper articles, books on parenting); professional bodies, support groups or adult education courses.

## A. Planning family education: rationale and aims

One important challenge is how to plan this extremely complex field or, indeed, whether to plan it at all.** The decision to plan or leave unplanned family education in a particular country lies with the Government, the planners and the citizens. They will decide whether educational activities outside the formal system should be organized and, if so, which activities need monitoring and public support. A good case exists for planning, however. It may be summarized as follows:

- Chapter III outlined the reasons why government investment in and development of the field of family education is desirable. Those reasons pertain to social demand, economic benefit, legal and equity considerations, educational efficiency and social development. In fact, statutory departments and agencies – health, education, social services, labour – are already heavily involved in what are likely to become the key areas of family education. Greater coordination among these sectors and with the voluntary agencies would optimize the use of public funds.

- The weakening of handed-down child-rearing skills in contemporary societies has made family education an urgent matter. It is a recognizable, unified and useful body of knowledge, the delivery of which can be planned at local, regional and national levels. Planning and coordination would make the public more aware of the importance of child-rearing and family skills.

- The trend is for government services to become intersectoral and decentralized, with integrated delivery of services and client participation. There is a move away from exclusive sectors (health, social services, labour, education) and target groups (children, youth, women, the disabled, the unhealthy) towards more integrated approaches to service delivery. Owing to its universality and the strength of its internal links, the family offers a unique, synthesizing approach to social issues [30]. Family

*Much harm was done to young mothers and their children in the developing world over 20 years ago by promoting the replacement of breast milk for infants. Less obvious but equally unsuitable is the promotion of Western socialization practices and values that ignore local understandings of ideal human qualities, social roles and work possibilities.

**For reasons of space, we cannot attempt to cover the planning field comprehensively nor, as Landers [29] has done in her excellent policy review of the early childhood field, can we examine the question of programme implementation.

education bridges several sectors and education stages from early childhood to continuing adult education. Along with citizenship education, it is a suitable choice for integrated, cross-sectoral planning.

- Family education would itself benefit from planning and coordination. Though recognizable as a body of knowledge and skills, it is extremely broad in its themes, it crosses non-formal and formal demarcation lines and it is delivered in a great variety of settings by diverse agencies. At the national level, however, it is frequently confused and fragmented. Different discourses are heard from the different sectors – health, education, social services – responsible for young children and families, not to mention the wastage of resources through lack of coordination. Parallel to the wastage of resources is serious underfunding of early childhood and family programming in each sector. In the education sector, for example, early childhood provision is, with few exceptions, the poor and dependent relation of primary education.

- Finally, and not without significance, family education can be planned and developed without excessive resort to public funds, because it is already strongly implanted throughout society. As will be seen below, its planning is more a question of coordination, setting learning objectives and the creation of a child-oriented culture than of heavy investments in new structures, personnel and training.

The case having been made that planning is desirable, two considerations suggest that the planning and control should not be centralized:

- One of the primary aims of family education is to build up self-reliance, social consciousness and participative decision-making among parents, which hardly accords with State control.

- A significant role in family education has traditionally been taken by the voluntary sector, which contributes idealism, buildings, staff and current expenses to the endeavour. This voluntary initiative must be encouraged rather than stifled.

Minimal planning would seem, therefore, to be the solution, with emphasis on working in concert rather than on control. The aims of such planning might be as follows:

- To heighten the profile of family education at the national and regional level and create a culture supportive of good child-rearing and the child's best interests.

- To provide mutual support between the agencies involved.

- To set general policies, coordinate activities, clarify areas of competence and avoid wasteful duplication of services.

- To measure learning needs and the delivery mechanisms available (see section below on collecting information).

- To identify priority areas and the most appropriate delivery mechanisms.

- To address questions of personnel and training.

- To eliminate inequity of coverage and lack of expertise by creating or supporting regional and local planning bodies, which would assist in obtaining seed-funding and cooperation from statutory agencies.

- To put in place national social communications programmes on urgent family education themes and to establish as rapidly as possible, information centres and/or hot lines for the public to access information and referral or counselling services.*

### B. A cooperative networking approach

The formation of cooperative networks may be a suitable means of achieving minimal, but effective, planning of a cross-sectoral enterprise such as family education. Cooperative, self-organizing networking is a voluntary and informal approach to coordinating the action of disparate sectors that has emerged recently in the literature and practice of management [32], [33].** It is characterized by the presence of many different actors – sectors, agencies, employers, voluntary bodies, media, adult education groups, family groups etc. – which aim to build a shared vision of needs and goals so as to collaborate in the development of integrated action strategies.

The aims of a cooperative network for the promotion of family education may be similar to the aims of planning outlined above, but the main aim will be to create a common vision of the needs and goals of family education within a particular national or local context. The strategies adopted may be actual engagement in common programmes, but when a network is first formed, the participating agencies may be more concerned with raising public awareness or responding to opportunities to further a common agenda. An example of a complex, decentralized cooperative network addressing the needs of children is India's Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). Critics of ICDS say that the funding, training and supervisory role of the central Government is too great and that the traditional administrative role of government officials is overemphasized, e.g. more importance is given to record keeping by *anganwadi* centre workers and control by supervisors than to outreach to communities or support and facilitation of client participation. Yet, the essential ingredients of the cooperative network are clearly present: wide representation, integrated programming and a shared vision that preventive health services for young children and mothers are a cornerstone of human resources planning.

### C. Information collection

Because governments themselves are generally the providers of formal childhood education, a statistical base exists in almost all countries to plan primary and secondary education. In contrast, the major suppliers of adult education are local government and non-governmental bodies: voluntary agencies, private bodies, local communities, professional associations, churches and, in the developed world, corporations. For this reason, most countries still have no reliable statistics to enable their planners to understand the gaps in their education provision and to establish priorities.*** Confusion also reigns on how adult education, or its branches such as family education, should be defined and planned.

Reliable statistical and qualitative information is needed in order to plan, mobilize resources, coordinate, manage and monitor a large-scale, flexible system of family education. There is a need to know, for example, the demographic and geographical variables, what demand exists for different types of education, what is available, the resource inputs, participation, efficiency, learning achievement, outputs and impacts. An analysis needs to be made of how such education fits in with national education goals and provision, with community needs and with the informal, socially directed learning available to families.****

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*See *Facts for Life: Lessons from Experience* for some excellent guidelines on communications through the media [31].

**See also *The Planning of Non-Formal Education* [34] and the many excellent contributions to educational planning contained in the IIEP series *Fundamentals of Educational Planning*.

***For a practical discussion of the subject, see *Manual for Statistics on Non-Formal Education* [35].

****In Western societies, at least, this type of learning is widespread. In a recent survey of Italian youth, for example, the respondents replied that they received most of their information about AIDS from television programmes. The great disadvantage of relying on this type of learning is obvious, however: one cannot know how many people have learned something nor what they have learned.

**Integrated child development services**

**Context**. At just less than 130 million, the under-6 population in India is more than seven times greater than that in the European Union. Although families continue to be the main or only providers, public services in India do manage to provide rudimentary health, social and educational services for many of these children. Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) is probably the largest scheme in the world for preschool children, reaching 14 million children and 2.7 million mothers [36]. For a relatively poor country, this is a significant achievement and compares well with the early childhood provision available in disadvantaged areas of the industrialized world.

**History.** ICDS was established by the Government of India in the mid-1970s to provide a comprehensive range of services to mothers and young children aged 0-6, on the premise that preventive health services for young children and mothers were a cornerstone of sound human resources planning. The educational aspects of child care were also stressed, with preschool centres being made the focal point of service delivery. Early childhood care and education services were further seen in the National Policy on Education of 1986 as a crucial input into primary education and a significant support for women wishing to work outside the home. A holistic view of mother and child was taken, recognizing the importance of maternal well-being for the healthy development of children. Mechanisms were created at the village level to deliver integrated services, with special attention being paid to low-income groups, including the scheduled castes, in rural or tribal areas.

**Services provided**. Muralidharan and Kaul summarized the services offered as follows [36]:

| *Beneficiary* | *Service* |
|---|---|
| Children below 3 years | Supplementary nutrition, immunization, health care, referral services |
| Children 3-6 years | All four services plus non-formal preschool education |
| Expectant and nursing mothers | Health care; immunization against tetanus; food, nutrition and health education |
| Other women 14-45 years | Nutrition, reproductive and health education |

**Coordination.** The work of coordinating such a large service is enormous at the service-delivery level (ca. 3,000 projects, some covering as many as 100,000 people, each divided into 100 *angawadi* centres with their local staff and tasks). At the management level (programming, supervision, liaison with administration, coordination of training, food supply, materials etc.) and at the administrative level (international agencies, local and state governments, the Government of India and its different agencies – Planning Commission, National Institute of Public Co-operation and Child Development, Department of Women and Child Development). Yet despite the complexity of the task and although it caters for a population as large as the total number of under-5 children in the United States, the programme works.

**Evaluation.** Numerous external evaluations – about 300 – have been carried out by agencies, non-governmental organizations or universities. Many weaknesses have been noted, but in general, the evaluations concur that the ICDS programme has achieved much for children and families in particularly disadvantaged circumstances and has done so cost-effectively (about $10 per child annually). Real improvements have been noted in infant mortality rates, the nutrition and health status of children, growth rates and effects on schooling.

*Source*: I. Siraj-Blatchford, *Nourish and Nurture: WFP's Assistance to Early Childhood Education in India's ICDS* (Paris, UNESCO, 1995).

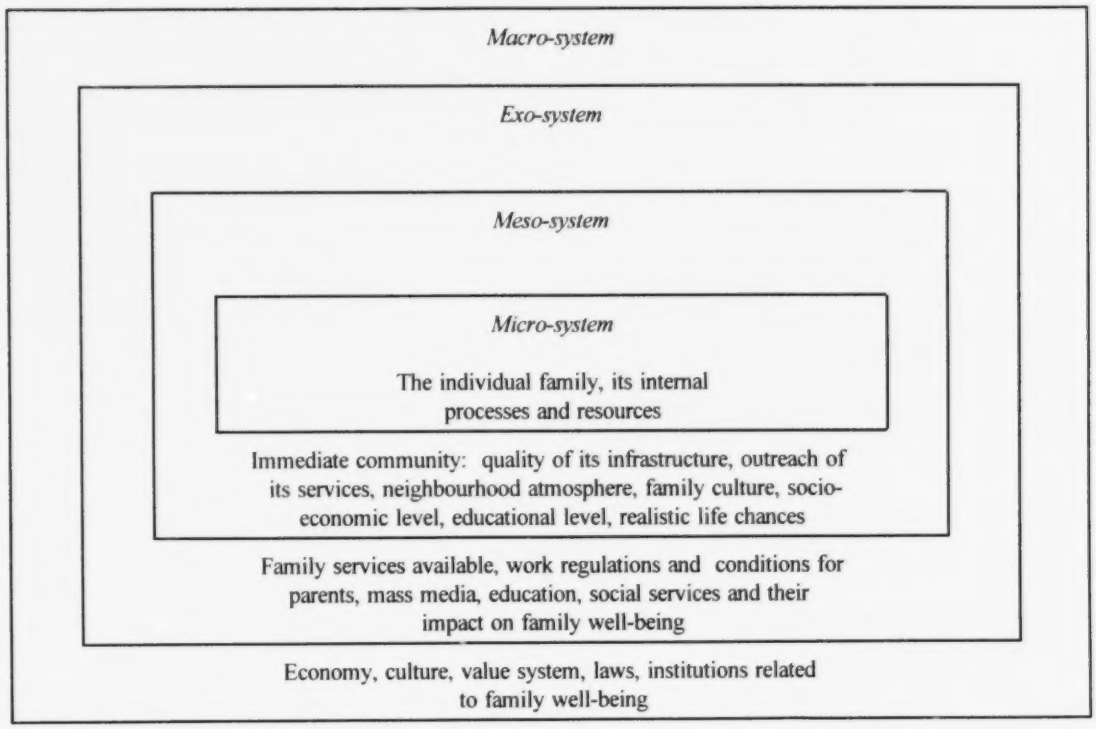
### D. Creation of adequate systems models

To allow coherent action, national and local systems of family education need to be modelled. Brofenbrenner's layered model for the mediating environments of the child may serve as an example to be adapted [37]. The model provides a framework within which developmental or educational action towards the child should be considered. There exist in this framework four interlocking systems, all in constant interaction:

- The microsystem, or home environment in which the child lives and grows.
- The meso-system, or the settings immediately outside the home with which family and child interact. Among these settings are the kindergarten and school.
- The exo-system, or the immediate social structures and institutions impinging on the home and school. Components are the neighbourhood environment, parent work environments, parent social networks, social services, mass media, economic conditions.
- The macro-system, or the overarching framework of society, its economy, culture, ideologies and customs, its laws and social institutions as they affect children.

Brofenbrenner's model focuses on the child, but with little modification, a parallel family model can be recreated that can serve as a conceptual tool for planning family education for a country or locality (see figure).

**Nested family model to clarify levels of intervention**


Macro-system
Exo-system
Meso-system
Micro-system
The individual family, its internal processes and resources
Immediate community: quality of its infrastructure, outreach of its services, neighbourhood atmosphere, family culture, socio-economic level, educational level, realistic life chances
Family services available, work regulations and conditions for parents, mass media, education, social services and their impact on family well-being
Economy, culture, value system, laws, institutions related to family well-being

Whether one is dealing with child or family, it may be noted that in many developing countries or in marginalized areas of the industrial world, the macro- and exo-systems may have little immediate influence on families. Illiterate or very poor parents are often unreached by the State, whose official economy or services hardly penetrate into disadvantaged communities.

### E. Delivery mechanisms, personnel and training

Who will initiate and provide family education? Because it is attached to such diverse settings, family education does not need to engender yet another group of experts who will produce greater dependency among parents. Rather, worthwhile social and educational objectives for parents and children can be achieved inexpensively and effectively:

- *By reinforcing existing education for parents at "privileged moments" of the life cycle, through the agency primarily responsible for a particular moment.* Almost all citizens within industrialized society go through points of passage that bring them into contact with an educational service, namely, kindergartens and schools, and the health, educational or social services for parents or prospective parents (health and family planning clinics, maternity clinics, day-care services, preschool services, family social services). The reinforcement of education at these points of passage should not be difficult if the political will to do so is present. In health and maternity clinics, for example, the medical care of young mothers from early pregnancy through the post-natal period could be supplemented by educational inputs for both parents about family relations, nutrition, health and child development. Likewise, preschools and schools, instead of excluding parents, could improve educational standards by working more closely with them. Difficulties could arise, however, unless staff can be given the training and motivation to take on this additional work.
- *By using schools as a source of preparation for parenthood.* Courses on health, nutrition, biology or sex education could be made more relevant to the present personal development of children and to their future parenthood role.*
- *By creating parent support groups.* These groups need not be led by an expert but can be informal, ad hoc peer groups that explore a common experience or solve a problem, e.g. parents attempting to examine family processes or to improve home support for children with learning difficulties. Successful groups of this kind also give their members better self-awareness and self-confidence, information-sharing, skill-building and the capacity to form supportive social networks.
- *By giving statutory support for voluntary groups.* Such groups would include education movements, counselling services and information and other services dealing with family, home economics, parent education, early child development etc.

From the above, it can be seen that in societies that have working social and educational services, it is unnecessary to create and train family education professionals in great numbers. There, the recommended strategy is fivefold:

- Reinforce the educational capacity of existing services (maternity clinics, kindergartens, schools etc.)
- Strengthen the existing school curricula where it relates to family education.
- Mobilize parents to form ad hoc groups for support, information or the pursuit of child or family interests at key moments.

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*See discussion in chapter II about socialization in schools, in particular, the recommendation to reinforce citizenship and personal development courses.

- Reinforce, through public funding, voluntary educational initiatives targeted at families.
- Use a contractual or chartering mechanism* to associate government and local communities in the provision of quality programmes.

**The Lifestart learning programme: Ireland**

**Context.** Among Western economies, Ireland has enjoyed a significant expansion in recent years. A strong middle class has emerged, along with a growing number of urban and rural populations that have been bypassed by progress. Poverty is a severe problem for many families both in isolated rural areas and in large housing estates on the outskirts of the major cities. The extended family and neighbourly, community welfare that once characterized rural society are on the wane. Parents, often single, are increasingly isolated and under stress and, in areas of social deprivation, unable to rear their children adequately. Research findings corroborate this social shift and show that up to a third of children entering school from disadvantaged areas have significantly low IQ ratings, with all the subsequent problems of poor self-image, underachievement tendency to drop out of school. Unemployment, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, social dependency or crime frequently complete the cycle of deprivation, which is repeated in the next generation. So far, effective public policies in preventive health and education have not been formulated or financed to meet the challenge of the new Irish poor, who no longer can take the traditional escape route to labour markets in Britain or the United States.

**The Lifestart response.** The Lifestart response is to mobilize communities of parents into self-actualizing bodies, to learn about child-rearing and, through parent councils, to address local issues and public policies affecting their children. There are five Lifestart suppositions: (a) that the years from birth to five years are critically important for self-image, personality balance and educational potential; (b) that parents are the primary educators of the child and that the home is the chief learning place; (c) that support from the extended family or the local community is essential to the well-being of parents and children; (d) that parents can be empowered by succeeding in their essential task of caring for and educating their children; and (e) that efforts to solve deep-rooted unemployment and poverty are doomed to failure if they do not address the core issues of community culture and nurture in the home.

**Phases of a Lifestart programme.** Phase I has three components: gaining the confidence of local parents, learning about their needs and adapting Lifestart parenting materials to their needs and language patterns so that they "own" them. These materials contain month-by-month descriptions of the physical, mental, emotional and social development of the child. Initial selection of local mothers and their training as family visitors then begins. Phase II comprises bi-monthly visitation of families with newborn children, with appropriate materials and information. All children up to five years, if they are not already covered, are included. Phase III entails cluster meetings for parents organized to provide mutual support, further information and practical demonstration. Parents themselves become multipliers of the programme and provide informal support to other parents experiencing difficulties. At the same time, a reference system for quality control is established. Visits to families, with a common format for parent and visitor evaluation are computerized and processed for feedback, networking and training sessions. Negotiations with other community bodies and local government social sectors is undertaken to obtain minimal funding or technical assistance. In one Lifestart programme, for example, home visitors are trained by the local health authority.

*Source*: Sean O'Connor, Lifestart, Ireland, personal communication, 1995.

*See the New Zealand Charter Development initiative as described in Moss and Pearce [38].

For effective outreach, the different statutory and voluntary services must develop their education capacities and train personnel. One element in training is to teach professional staff to work productively with parents or would-be parents during key life experiences. The emphasis in all settings, professional or voluntary, should be on experiential learning, "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of the experience of the learner who is at the centre of the learning process" [39].* Parents and would-be parents are highly motivated to learn at those moments when their vital needs or those of their children are at stake. They can absorb complex information pertinent to child-rearing, family relationships, community responsibilities and even broad social concerns if the opportunity is given to them. Among groups with little schooling, however, learning is more effective if conducted face-to-face by paraprofessional parents or by peer groups. In all cases, family life education is more meaningful when it is planned at the community level and in terms of local interest.

### F. Summary and recommendations

This occasional paper has attempted to give the reader an overview of the characteristic modes of family functioning in survival and industrialized societies. Both modes have their strengths and weaknesses, but it is certain that families all over the world are today facing severe disruption and impoverishment. As the family is the basic unit of society, the effects of this crisis on personal and social development are very negative.

Trends in the field of education, in particular the movement towards life-long education, may favour renewed support for the education of families. Such a development will greatly improve the learning potential of children, which is closely linked with family educational levels and organization. As Torres remarks, the school by itself is hardly capable of overcoming the economic, social and cultural disadvantages of students coming from deprived sectors [41]. On the contrary, it tends to reproduce these disadvantages.

The great diversity of the educational input targeted at families and the wide variety of sources underline the need to plan this growing field more effectively. To preserve the autonomy of the voluntary sector, such planning should take place along cooperative networking lines.

Five major strategies are proposed to expand the educational opportunities open to family members at key moments in the life cycle: reinforce the educational capacity of existing services (maternity clinics, kindergartens, schools, family services); strengthen modules relevant to family education in existing school curricula; reinforce, through statutory grants, voluntary educational initiatives toward families; mobilize parents to form ad hoc support groups; and promote contractual agreements between local government and communities to improve child care and education.

It has been stressed throughout the paper that family education initiatives must be relevant to people's concerns and that disadvantaged groups have a prior right to benefit from such initiatives. Naive, culture-bound family education programmes based on middle-class ideals and outcomes have little place in survival situations where essential skills are required and adaptive patterns built up from necessity may have to be reversed.** Attention also needs to be given to gender bias: for example, in some societies, preschool girl children are malnourished as they come last in the established feeding order.

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*For an excellent discussion of the subject, see also *Enhancing the Skills of Early Childhood Trainers* [40].

**In developing countries, for example, older preschool children in extended family households tend to develop well if they receive affection and attention. On the other hand, if they belong to single-parent families and are displaced by a new baby, their development tends to slow significantly in the second year. Their situation is one that needs attention, especially in urban slums where mothers are poor, illiterate and denied extended family help [42].

In addition, interventions should be culturally sensitive. Patterns of development in young children may indeed be universal: across cultures, all infants sit, crawl, stand up, walk and talk at roughly the same ages. In the rearing of the child, however, distinctive cultural differences appear. These differences are important in that they indicate an adaptation by a culture to specific circumstances. For example, in the competitive, communications-dominated cultures of the West, care givers encourage verbal skills and independence in children; in contrast, in many rural societies, respectful silence before elders and cooperative skills are inculcated. Family educators must have empathy with the groups among whom they work and be aware of the possible outcomes for families and children living in certain cultures or situations.

A constraint that family education shares in all cultures and economies is that unlike formal education, which is a certified process giving access to employment and social position, family education is concerned with achieving competence rather than social mobility. It is a voluntary activity, and as its rewards are not so easily discernible, the public does not perceive it to be as worthwhile as formal education. An enthusiasm for parent education must be tempered, therefore, by a consideration of what will work. In this perspective, the following recommendations may be helpful:

- *Invest in a strong social communications programme to make the rewards of family education known.* For instance, make it known that parenting with knowledge and foresight can often prevent drug or alcohol abuse by children. Such a programme would also appeal to a society's sense of responsibility, to ensure that child care, health and education are not neglected or to reinforce family-friendly policies, such as better protection for young mothers in the labour market and support for child-care services.

- *Link service provision with education obligation.* In India, participation in the ICDS programme was made attractive to mothers not only by the promise of better health held out to them and their children but also because the programme was linked with receiving free food. The success of the parent schools in China depended to some extent on the obligation placed on the school to provide family education and on the social obligation placed on parents to follow courses. In wealthier, democratic states, it is unlikely that either strategy would work. Yet in France, the expedient of linking maternity monitoring with *post facto* social security payments has had excellent results: it motivates young mothers to go through with the prescribed visits to health clinics during pregnancy and after birth. It should not be beyond the capacity of intelligent policy planners to forge links between family education and the immediate self-interest of parents.

- *To respond actively to genuine public concerns.* Given the tragic problems being faced by a growing number of families, concerns about early childhood care and development, juvenile crime and drug abuse, teenage pregnancy and after-school care for children are urgent. The family education movement may be able to make a real contribution to social development by confronting reality rather than by appeals to "familial" values or by looking with nostalgia towards the past.

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